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Thirteenth semi-annual report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004)

I. Background

1. The present report is my thirteenth semi-annual report on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004). It reviews and assesses progress made in the implementation of the resolution since my previous report, dated 18 October 2010 (S/2010/538). It underlines the lack of progress on key provisions of the resolution, and highlights concerns that continue to impede efforts to strengthen Lebanon's sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence, which stand at the heart of the resolution.

2. Political tension in Lebanon increased markedly during the reporting period fuelled, inter alia, by speculation and public pronouncements concerning the proceedings of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon. The differences between political camps brought about the suspension of Cabinet meetings for five weeks, from 10 November until 15 December. On that day, the Cabinet meeting ended in a stalemate, leading to institutional paralysis. Against that backdrop, Saudi Arabia and the Syrian Arab Republic jointly deployed efforts to address the growing crisis.

3. On 12 January, the resignation of 10 Cabinet ministers from the opposition, along with 1 minister from President Michel Sleiman's bloc forced the collapse of the Government of National Unity. On 13 January, President Sleiman accepted the resignation of the ministers, but requested that the Government continue to function in a caretaker capacity. The collapse of the Government led to an increase in political tensions in the country. This culminated in a series of demonstrations in support of the caretaker Prime Minister, Saad Hariri, on 24 and 25 January, involving incidents of vandalism. The demonstrations ended as Prime Minister Hariri called for calm and reiterated his movement's adherence to the principles of democracy.

4. On 17 January, the Special Tribunal for Lebanon Prosecutor, Daniel Bellemare, submitted a confidential indictment and supporting materials for the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri to the Pre-Trial Judge, Daniel Fransen. On the same day, I reiterated my call on all parties to refrain from attempts to interfere in or influence the work of the Special Tribunal, underlining that the independent judicial process should not be linked with any political debate and that no one should prejudge its outcome.

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5. On 19 January, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia publicly announced the end of the Syrian-Saudi efforts to address the Lebanese political crisis. Two days earlier, Qatar and Turkey had launched a new mediation effort to solve the crisis; that effort reached a dead end on 20 January.

6. On 25 January, and following two days of constitutionally mandated consultations with all parliamentary groups, President Sleiman requested Najib Miqati to form a new Government. To date, Mr. Miqati's consultations are ongoing. Since he was tasked to form a Government, he has placed great emphasis on reaching out to all parties in Lebanon.

7. On 14 February, a political rally took place in Beirut to commemorate the sixth anniversary of the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri and 22 others. On this occasion, I issued a statement in which I reaffirmed the commitment of the United Nations to the efforts of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon to uncover the truth so as to bring those responsible to justice and send a message that impunity would not be tolerated.

8. On 27 February, the 14 March coalition announced that it would not take part in the future Government, and that its opposition platform would be based on support for the Special Tribunal for Lebanon and rejection of Hizbullah's arms.

9. On 13 March, the 14 March coalition held a major political rally to commemorate the sixth anniversary of its formation. All speakers at the rally expressed strong support for the Special Tribunal for Lebanon and denounced the continued possession by Hizbullah of arms outside the control of the State and their use as a political instrument in the domestic arena.

10. Over the reporting period, the political polarization between the two main camps in Lebanon has deepened significantly, as demonstrated by a series of sharp statements and the delay in the formation of a new Government. In addition, a series of demonstrations took place calling for the abolishment of the confessional governing system in the country, in the shadow of momentous events elsewhere in the region.

II. Implementation of resolution 1559 (2004)

11. I recall with satisfaction that since the adoption of Security Council resolution 1559 on 2 September 2004, several of its provisions have been implemented. Presidential and parliamentary elections took place in a free and fair manner. The Syrian Arab Republic withdrew its troops and military assets from Lebanon in April 2005. Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic established full diplomatic relations in 2009.

12. However, the delineation of Syrian-Lebanese border, which was strongly encouraged by the Security Council in its resolution 1680 (2006), has not yet taken place. More importantly, the existence and activities of Lebanese and non-Lebanese militia continue to pose a threat to the stability of the country and the region, and highlight the need for the Government of Lebanon and the Lebanese Armed Forces to exercise a monopoly on the use of force throughout Lebanon. More efforts need to be deployed to achieve the full implementation of resolution 1559 (2004) and to maintain the achievements already accomplished.

13. During the reporting period, my representatives and I have remained in regular contact with all parties in Lebanon, as well as with relevant regional and international leaders. I met Prime Minister Hariri in New York on 9 January.

14. Over the last six months, there has been no tangible progress towards the implementation of the remaining provisions of the resolution, in particular in the context of domestic political tensions.

A. Sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and political independence of Lebanon

15. The objective of resolution 1559 (2004) is to strengthen the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and political independence of Lebanon under the sole and exclusive authority of its Government consistent with the Taif Accord of 1989, to which all the political parties in Lebanon have committed themselves. This goal has remained the highest priority of my efforts to facilitate the implementation of all resolutions pertaining to Lebanon.

16. In its resolution 1680 (2006), the Security Council strongly encouraged the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to respond positively to the request by the Government of Lebanon to delineate their common border. In that context, I have maintained my efforts to encourage the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon to achieve the full delineation of their common border. The delineation and demarcation of Lebanon's boundaries are an essential element in guaranteeing the country's territorial integrity. It is also a critical element in allowing for proper border control. Despite the commitments of the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon reflected in the outcome of several summit meetings between President Assad and President Sleiman, since August 2008, no progress was registered over the reporting period on this critical issue. The joint Lebanese-Syrian border committee that is tasked with this matter has not yet convened. So far, only Lebanon has designated its participants to the committee. Over the reporting period, there have been no discussions or contacts between Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic on the delineation of their common border. While acknowledging the bilateral nature of border delineation, progress on this matter remains an obligation of the two countries under Security Council resolution 1680 (2006), derived from resolution 1559 (2004).

17. The Israel Defense Forces continues to occupy the northern part of the village of Ghajar and an adjacent area north of the Blue Line, in violation of Lebanon's sovereignty and resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006). On 17 November 2010, the Israeli Cabinet decided to accept, in principle, the United Nations proposal for a withdrawal of the Israel Defense Forces from the northern part of the village and its redeployment south of the Blue Line. My representatives and I have since engaged closely with both parties in the implementation of the proposal, as detailed in my last report to the Security Council on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) (S/2011/91). Further, efforts in relation to the issue of the Shab'a Farms area have not recorded any progress, as I have still not received any responses from either the Syrian Arab Republic or Israel regarding the provisional definition of the area contained in my report on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), dated 30 October 2007 (S/2007/641).

18. Israeli overflights of Lebanese territory continued during the reporting period, on an almost daily basis, including an increased number of fighter jets. This intense regime of aerial surveillance violates resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006), and Lebanese sovereignty. It also increases tensions. The Government of Lebanon has repeatedly protested those violations. I have deplored the violations and demanded that they cease immediately. Israeli authorities claim in turn that the overflights are carried out for security reasons, citing alleged breaches to the arms embargo enforced pursuant to resolution 1701 (2006).

B. Extension of Government control over all Lebanese territory

19. The Lebanese Armed Forces and the Internal Security Forces play a crucial role in strengthening Lebanon's sovereignty and control over the entire country. The outgoing Government of Lebanon had reaffirmed to the United Nations its intention to extend the State's authority over all Lebanese territory, so that it is eventually the sole armed force in the country, as called for in resolution 1559 (2004) and the 1989 Taif Accord.

20. As I have reported elsewhere to the Security Council in greater detail, in several incidents during the reporting period, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) was denied freedom of movement within its area of operations, which endangered the safety and security of the United Nations peacekeepers. The freedom of movement of UNIFIL and the security and safety of its personnel are integral to the effective execution of the Force's mandate. The primary responsibility for ensuring the freedom of movement to UNIFIL in its area of operations lies with the Lebanese authorities.

21. I am concerned by repeated security incidents involving the use of weapons and explosives in populated areas during the reporting period, as manifested most recently in the explosion of a device containing 2 kilograms of TNT inside a church in Zahle. These occurrences confirm yet again the possession of lethal weapons by non-State actors. They also demonstrate a complete disregard for the safety of Lebanon's civilian population, Lebanese law and for the authority of the Lebanese Government by armed groups. More needs to be done by the Lebanese authorities to impose law and order throughout the country.

22. Security sources in Lebanon have continued to report shootings and explosions in and around paramilitary infrastructures in the eastern Beka'a Valley belonging to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC) and Fatah al-Intifadah, confirming that paramilitary training occurs in those facilities. The permanent presence of such bases along the Syrian-Lebanese border adds to the general porosity of parts of the land border and poses a challenge for the control of the border by the Lebanese Security Forces. It also makes the border delineation more difficult.

23. The continued existence and activities of militias in Lebanon require improving the management and control of Lebanon's land borders to prevent the unauthorized flows of people and weapons as well as commercial smuggling. Member States have continued to express concern over the illegal transfer of weapons across Lebanon's land borders, in violation of resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006). Government officials in Lebanon have acknowledged the porous nature of the border and the possibility that arms smuggling has occurred during the

past three years, and have taken limited steps to confront the issue. However, the Government of Lebanon still lacks a systematic approach to border management and made no progress towards the extension of the Common Border Force along the entire border with the Syrian Arab Republic during the reporting period, owing, in particular, to Government deadlock and the absence of a budget. Information provided by Member States of illegal transfers of weapons continues to mount. I also took careful note of recent reports and allegations of an illegal flow of weapons from Lebanon bound to the Syrian Arab Republic. I take all these reports very seriously, but the United Nations does not have the means to verify them independently.

24. While the work of the Common Border Force along the Syrian-Lebanese border is commendable, current efforts need to be increased and become more systematic, to ensure a strict control along the border. Also, the effective management of the border would benefit greatly from increased cooperation between Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic in addition to the delineation of their common border. It is an obligation under Security Council resolutions that all States take the measures necessary to prevent the transfer of arms to groups outside the control of the Government of Lebanon. This is a factor key to stability in Lebanon and the region.

C. Disbanding and disarmament of Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias

25. In its resolution 1559 (2004), the Security Council calls for the disbanding and disarming of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias. This key remaining provision of the resolution is yet to be implemented. It merely reflects and reaffirms a decision to which all Lebanese committed themselves under the Taif Accord in 1989, in the aftermath of the civil war. At the time, the understanding led Lebanese militias, with the exception of Hizbullah, to give up their weapons.

26. Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias continue to operate in the country outside of the Government's control, in serious violation of resolution 1559 (2004). While several groups across the political spectrum in Lebanon possess weapons outside Government control, the armed component of Hizbullah is the most significant and most heavily armed Lebanese militia in the country. In addition, a series of Palestinian armed groups are operating in the country within and outside the refugee camps.

27. Regrettably, during the reporting period, there was no tangible progress towards the disbanding and disarming of Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias as called for in the Taif Accord and resolution 1559 (2004), although caretaker Prime Minister Hariri and other members of his coalition have succeeded in bringing the issue back at the centre of the political debate in Lebanon. The continued existence of Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias undermines the rights of every Lebanese citizen to live without fear of physical harm and also undermines the consolidation of Lebanon as a democratic State and the stability of the country and the region. It is also incompatible with the objective of strengthening Lebanon's sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and political independence.

28. In spite of the endorsement by all Lebanese parties of the Taif Accord, which is enshrined in the Lebanese Constitution, and which every Lebanese Government has committed to implement since 1989, and in spite of the provisions of resolution

1559 (2004), Hizbullah acknowledges that it maintains a substantial paramilitary capacity that remains distinct from the Lebanese Armed Forces. Hizbullah claims that its arsenal, which is separate from that of the Lebanese State, is for defensive purposes against Israel.

29. During the early hours of 18 January, a few thousand unarmed men organized in groups, reportedly militants of Hizbullah, deployed in various parts of Beirut and other cities. The deployment was widely regarded in Lebanon as a show of strength and an implied threat by Hizbullah on the day that the Prosecutor of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon had transmitted to the Pre-Trial Judge of the Special Tribunal an indictment in the case of the assassination of Rafiq Hariri and 22 others in 2005. The deployment took place a few days ahead of the start of consultations by the Lebanese President with all the parliamentary groups for the designation of a new Prime Minister. The Lebanese Army eventually deployed personnel in several locations of Beirut, citing the need to reassure citizens.

30. In several public pronouncements during the reporting period, senior officials of Hizbullah not only acknowledged maintaining a considerable arsenal but also affirmed that it was seeking to upgrade it. As recently as 19 March 2011, the Secretary-General of Hizbullah stated publicly that his party would continue to arm itself for what he termed defensive purposes. The United Nations is not in a position to verify independently the assertions that are made, but takes them very seriously.

31. Over the last six months, Hizbullah's maintenance of a substantial arsenal outside of Government control has become a central issue of disagreement in the public debate, as many Lebanese see the continued existence of such arms as an implicit threat for use within Lebanon, bearing in mind the events of May 2008. After several years of subscribing to a tenuous national consensus on the legitimacy of the arms of Hizbullah, the 14 March coalition leaders have returned to singling out Hizbullah's weapons as the main bone of contention in the country. On 10 March, the coalition launched its new political manifesto with a meeting at the Bristol Hotel in Beirut under the slogan "the people are stronger than arms". Moreover, in a major political rally to mark the sixth anniversary of the formation of the 14 March Alliance, all the 14 March leaders denounced the possession by Hizbullah of paramilitary capacities outside Government control and its adverse effect on the political arena and domestic peace. Outgoing Prime Minister Hariri held another similar rally in Tripoli on 17 March, where he deplored what he termed the hegemony of the weapons of Hizbullah.

32. On 16 February, on the occasion of Martyr Day, the Secretary-General of Hizbullah delivered a defiant speech, in which he stated that the 14 March campaign against the party's arms was futile and would not lead anywhere. In a more recent public pronouncement on 19 March, the Secretary-General of Hizbullah rejected what he deemed a campaign of incitement against his movement.

33. I recall that the National Dialogue, whose main mandate is to develop a national defence strategy that would address the critical issue of weapons outside the control of the State, had reconvened after the May 2008 events, during which Hizbullah and other armed groups engaged in heavy clashes in many regions throughout the country, resulting in the loss of life, injuries, damage to property and general instability. The objective of this mechanism is consistent with my firm conviction that the disarmament of Hizbullah and other militias can best be achieved through a Lebanese-led political process.

34. Since 2008, the National Dialogue has failed to form the hoped-for consensus among Lebanese leaders which would contribute to the maintenance of domestic stability. Most importantly, it has fallen short of expectations in terms of the development of a national defence strategy. Deliberations at the most recent sessions reflected the strong opposition by Hizbullah and its political allies to discussing the issue of the party's weapons. In addition, for the first time since the 8 March group was established, all the representatives of the group — with the exception of the Speaker of the Parliament, Nabih Berri, who attended in his institutional capacity and not as President of the Amal movement — boycotted the last session called for by President Sleiman on 4 November 2010. The National Dialogue has not reconvened since, in the context of growing tensions between the two main political alliances, thereby leaving this sensitive matter unaddressed.

35. With respect to the situation of Palestinians in Lebanon, I am pleased to report that, pursuant to the adoption in August 2010 by Lebanon's Parliament of amendments to the Labour Code and the Social Security Law, that lifted some of the restrictions on work for Palestinian refugees in the country, the Lebanese caretaker Minister of Labour, Boutros Harb, signed on 22 February an administrative decree regulating the implementation of those amendments. This represents an important and positive step that, once fully implemented, will contribute to improving the living conditions of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.

36. In this context, I am glad to report that the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization has reiterated its call upon all Palestinians in Lebanon to respect the sovereignty and political independence of Lebanon and adhere to Lebanese law and security requirements.

37. The presence of Palestinian armed groups outside the camps continues to challenge the ability of Lebanon to exercise full sovereignty over its territory. I have called upon the Government of Lebanon to dismantle the Damascus-headquartered PFLP-GC and Fatah Al-Intifada military bases in the country, and on the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to cooperate with those efforts. Regrettably, there has been no progress during the reporting period towards the disarming of such groups, as called for and agreed upon by Lebanese leaders at the National Dialogue session of 2006 and reaffirmed in subsequent sessions of the National Dialogue since 2008.

38. The situation in most of the 12 Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon has remained relatively stable, although a few shooting incidents and explosions have been registered in some of the camps, in particular in Ain al-Hilweh, where, as recently as 31 March, clashes erupted between rival groups inside the camp. The threat of internal violence that could potentially spill over into surrounding areas still exists in a number of camps, as some of them continue to provide safe haven for those who seek to escape the authority of the State.

39. Notwithstanding those incidents, Lebanese authorities have acknowledged the existence of good cooperation between the Lebanese Armed Forces and Palestinian security officials in the camps. However, Lebanese authorities do not maintain a permanent presence inside the camps, despite the fact that the Cairo agreement of 1969 — which permitted the presence of Palestinian armed forces in the refugee camps — was annulled by the Lebanese Parliament in 1987. More will need to be done to contain potential tension in the camps.

40. The situation of Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon remains, by and large, dire. The United Nations continues to urge the Lebanese authorities to improve the conditions in which Palestinian refugees live in Lebanon, without prejudice to the eventual resolution of the Palestinian refugee question in the context of a comprehensive peace agreement in the region, in particular given the detrimental effects of dismal living conditions on the wider security situation.

III. Observations

41. To my deep regret, owing to the political crisis and institutional paralysis in Lebanon, there has been no progress towards the implementation of the remaining provisions of resolution 1559 (2004), since my last report to the Security Council. Events during the reporting period suggest deterioration in the situation in Lebanon. I am profoundly concerned by the increased tension in the country generated, inter alia, by speculation over the proceedings of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon. The positions in favour and against the special Tribunal are becoming growingly entrenched and are polarizing the country. In addition, the widespread proliferation of weapons outside of the State's control, combined with the continued existence of heavily armed militias, are ominous for domestic peace and the prosperity of Lebanon. Preserving the stability of Lebanon and ensuring an end to impunity there is essential, if only because the Lebanese themselves have the right to both.

42. Given the confessional structure of Lebanon, the search for consensus is critical to maintain domestic stability in the country. It is therefore imperative that the spirit of entente and respect for the principles of coexistence and security prevail, without intimidation. The political leaders of the country must focus on strengthening the sovereignty and independence of their country and its institutions, a process that must ultimately result in the complete disarmament of all militias in Lebanon. I urge all political leaders to transcend sectarian and individual interests and genuinely promote the future and the interests of the State. At the same time, this should not detract from the full implementation of resolution 1559 (2004) and all other Security Council resolutions pertaining to Lebanon, which remain the best guarantee for Lebanon's long-term prosperity and stability as a democratic State.

43. I have repeatedly cautioned that the existence of militias outside Government control is a fundamental anomaly that stands against the democratic aspirations of the Lebanese people and threatens domestic peace. Armed groups defying the control of the State are incompatible with the objective of strengthening Lebanon's sovereignty and political independence and with the protection of Lebanon's unique pluralistic system and the rights of Lebanese citizens. I condemn the use of illegal weapons wherever it occurs in Lebanon, in particular in populated areas. For that reason, I appeal to all parties, within and outside Lebanon, to immediately halt all efforts to transfer and acquire weapons and to build paramilitary capacities outside the authority of the State. All foreign financial and material support for Lebanon should be channelled transparently through the Government of Lebanon only.

44. With the collapse of the Government of National Unity in January, the issue of Hizbullah's weapons was again thrust into the spotlight of the political debate in Lebanon, with confessional overtones, but with implications for all Lebanese. Hizbullah's arsenal creates an atmosphere of intimidation and poses a key challenge to the safety of Lebanese civilians and to the Government's monopoly on the

legitimate use of force. I call upon the leaders of Hizbullah to complete without delay the group's transformation into a solely Lebanese political party and to disarm, consistent with the requirements set out in the Taif Accord and resolution 1559 (2004). In a democratic State, a political party cannot maintain its own militia. This is incompatible with Lebanon's high ideals of the protection of human rights.

45. As Hizbullah maintains close ties with regional States, I call upon all regional States to support and assist in the transformation of the armed group into a solely political party and its disarmament, consistent with the requirements of the Taif Accord and resolution 1559 (2004), in the best interest of regional peace and stability. This requirement has become even more urgent against the backdrop of the ongoing political upheavals across the region.

46. I remain convinced that the disarmament of armed groups in Lebanon, in particular Hizbullah, can best be achieved through a Lebanese-led political process, though this process cannot make headway until external actors cease their support for Hizbullah and the group itself accepts its responsibility to play by Lebanon's political rules. I regret that the primary internal mechanism for addressing this issue of fundamental importance to the Lebanese polity, the National Dialogue, has been unable to produce so far any tangible progress towards this goal.

47. I therefore call on Lebanese leaders to reconvene, under the auspices of President Sleiman, the National Dialogue. Lebanese leaders must work together to maintain stability, avoid hostile and incendiary rhetoric, and prevent the use of violence, in particular the resort to arms, in the domestic political arena. Lebanese leaders must also make progress towards adopting a national defence strategy that will address the issue of armed groups outside the control of the State and lead to their disarmament, to achieve the ultimate goal of putting all arms in Lebanon under the sole control of the Government.

48. In that context, I expect the next Government of Lebanon to adhere to resolution 1559 (2004) and all other Security Council resolutions pertaining to Lebanon. I welcome the positive statements of Prime Minister Designate Miqati, in which he expressed his commitment to Lebanon's international obligations. I also look forward to the next Government of Lebanon translating this commitment into tangible action, beginning with the implementation of decisions taken in the past by the National Dialogue, such as the dismantling of Palestinian military bases outside the refugee camps.

49. On that issue, there has been no progress. Paramilitary infrastructures outside the refugee camps belonging to the Damascus-headquartered PFLP-GC and Fatah Al-Intifadah continue to be of great concern to me. They remain beyond the authority of the Lebanese State, despite the decision taken by the National Dialogue in 2006 and reiterated several times since. The bases, most of which straddle the border between Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, undermine Lebanese sovereignty and challenge the country's ability to manage its land borders. Mindful that the two militias maintain close regional ties, I renew my call upon the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to assist in this process.

50. In this regard, I note with regret that in the shadow of the current political crisis, there have been no further discussions or contacts between Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic on the delineation of their common border, despite pledges by both leaders already in 2008 to address this issue. I urge Lebanon and the Syrian

Arab Republic to move forward without further delay on this issue, which has a critical impact on enhancing border control.

51. I call upon the next Government of Lebanon, when it is formed, to continue the efforts undertaken by former Prime Ministers Siniora and Hariri to help to alleviate the situation in Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, which, I fear, is vulnerable to exploitation for political purposes. Conditions faced by Palestinian refugees in Lebanon remain dismal. I recall the commendable step taken in 2010 by Lebanon to ease restrictions on the access of refugees to the labour market. I also note, however, that more needs to be done to improve the living conditions of Palestinian refugees, without prejudice to an overall resolution of the Palestinian refugee questions within the framework of a comprehensive peace agreement. I am convinced that addressing the difficult conditions of Palestinian refugees will have a positive impact on the coexistence of Lebanese and Palestinians, and hence on national security and stability. I therefore call upon Lebanese and Palestinian authorities to continue their productive contacts, and upon Member States to offer whatever assistance may be required to continue the consolidation of political dialogue and security in the camps.

52. Recent security incidents highlight the need for Lebanese security forces to do more to prevent and respond to acts of violence, and for the Government of Lebanon and all relevant political leaders to make clear that such acts will not be tolerated. While the Lebanese security forces are careful not to inflame sectarian tensions by appearing to take sides, they clearly have a duty to enforce Lebanese law and to protect Lebanon's civilian population from harm. In that context, increased support for the Lebanese Armed Forces remains critical. They have continued to act with resolve, and their capacity had been gradually strengthened with the assistance of international donors. I am grateful to those countries that are helping to equip and train the Lebanese Armed Forces, and I urge the international community to continue this critically required support. This is essential to enable the Lebanese Armed Forces to assume effectively its responsibility under relevant Security Council resolutions.

53. I deplore the continued Israeli violations of Lebanon's sovereignty and territorial integrity. I call upon Israel to adhere to its obligations under relevant Security Council resolutions and withdraw from the northern part of the village of Ghajar and cease its overflights of Lebanese airspace that raise tension, undermine the credibility of Lebanese security services, increase the risk of unintended conflict and generate anxiety among the civilian population.

54. In sum, the absence of a functioning Government in Lebanon for several months has created a power and security vacuum of which extremist and armed groups could take advantage, in an already fragile and polarized situation. I call upon the Government to be formed in Lebanon, a founding member of the United Nations, to commit to the implementation of resolution 1559 (2004) and all other Security Council resolutions pertaining to Lebanon, and to take tangible measures towards their implementation. I am indeed deeply concerned that the combination of mistrust among the parties and the continued presence of militias could lead to tensions and possible insecurity and instability in Lebanon and beyond. It is therefore imperative that Lebanon preserve its comprehensive political framework of coexistence in mutual respect, as set out in the Taif Accord.

55. In the midst of momentous events in North Africa and the Middle East, the culture of intimidation by armed groups is, more than ever, unacceptable. The upheavals throughout the region will necessarily affect Lebanon. I urge all the friends and neighbours of Lebanon to play a constructive role in supporting the sovereignty and political independence of the country.

56. Against the backdrop of the upheavals across the region, the United Nations and Member States must remain firmly committed to the implementation of resolution 1559 (2004) for the sake of regional peace and stability, in a particularly difficult and challenging time. I, therefore, call upon all parties and actors to fully abide by resolutions 1559 (2004), 1680 (2006) and 1701 (2006). I will continue my efforts for the purpose of the full implementation of these and all other Security Council resolutions pertaining to Lebanon.